

OrdnanceReports

News updates from around the world



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Maintenance keeps trucks rolling, soldiers talking

by U.S. Army Spc. Julia Simpkins, U.S. Central Command

CAMP AS SAYLIYAH, Qatar — Forklifts, giant tires and tactical vehicles. Those are some of the tools of the 758th Maintenance Detachment, an Army Reserve unit from Columbus, Ohio. A direct-support maintenance company, they fix weapons, communications equipment, wheeled vehicles and refrigeration units.

"We work on everything but combat vehicles," said Staff Sgt. Vincent Gillam, maintenance control supervisor. "We replace engines and drive trains on tactical vehicles. Our primary mission is to support Army Central Command."

Divided into six sections, the 46-soldier company was activated on Dec. 27.

"So far we've generated 374 jobs; some days we might do five, some days none. Right now the communications and electronics section is working on nine jobs," Gillam said.

In addition, they repair electronics such as radios and night-vision goggles, small arms and mortars. They serve Camp Snoop and Patriot missile sites at Doha and Raslaffan, which is about 100 miles away.

"We work on any Army communication equipment there is. We just got done working with Central Command fixing their gates, fabricating pallet stackers for the Air Force and making some tire cages for their task force," said 1st Lt. Darren Long, company commander.

Gillam said the maintenance company staff is an all-purpose fabrication team.

"If somebody comes in with a drawing, we can pretty much make it—as long as it's not wood," he laughed. "We're a metal fabrication shop."

U.S. troops push into Baghdad's outskirts

by David Crary

U.S. troops surged forward Thursday into the outskirts of Baghdad, and a special forces unit raided one of Saddam Hussein's presidential palaces. American officials said Iraqi forces appeared on the verge of collapse.



Spc. Derrik Van Camp, a wheeled vehicle repair specialist from the 758th Maintenance Detachment, an Army reserve unit from Columbus, Ohio, tightens hose clamps on a 5-ton truck. U.S. Army photo by Spc. Julia Simpkins

The unit works with anyone on post who needs assistance they can offer.

"We're doing some welding for the Seabees right now because we're the only portable welders on post," Gillam said.

Long said the unit, while enjoying the comforts of near-civilian schedules, is fully capable of forward support.

"We're a corps-support unit, but we are forward deployable," he said. "We're a direct-support unit — we can do anything from working in buildings to going to chase tanks around and fixing them."

Lead units of the multi-pronged U.S. assault force were approaching from two directions: Army troops closed in from the southwest after crossing the Euphrates River; Marine units advanced from the southeast in a long column along the Tigris River.

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U.S. troops push into Baghdad's outskirts continued

"We are getting closer and closer," said Navy Capt. Frank Thorp, a Central Command spokesman. "We will be in Baghdad within a matter of hours from when we decide to go."

Paving the way, special forces infiltrated some Iraqi command posts in the Baghdad area and secured strategic dams and bridges to guard them from sabotage. The air assault on the capital continued, with coalition forces targeting a row of tin shelters near the site of Baghdad's old airport.

Another group of commandos raided the Thar Thar presidential palace, in a resort area 56 miles north of Baghdad.

Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks, in a briefing at Central Command, said the raiders landed by helicopter in the palace compound after suppressing anti-aircraft fire. The commandos found no leaders there, but came away with documents that will be reviewed by intelligence officers, Brooks said.

He also said that coalition forces "don't think that the fighting is over yet."

"There are still options that are open to the regime, including weapons of mass destruction," he said. "We take that very seriously."

His position was echoed by a spokesman for British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who told his Cabinet Thursday not to expect a quick resolution to the war.

Another U.S. spokesman, Navy Lt. Mark Kitchens, said U.S. forces are seeing "strong and credible signs that the Iraqi forces are being overwhelmed and will soon collapse."

However, Iraqi authorities vowed to make a stand, raising the possibility that some units had been pulled into Baghdad for urban warfare rather than risk a head-on clash outside the city.

While some Marine units advanced toward the capital, others from the 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines battled building to building with Iraqi fighters in Kut, a military town on the Tigris. Three Marines were wounded, and Lt. Col. B.P. McCoy said 30 Iraqis were killed, including 10 to 15 gunned down when they attempted what he called a suicide charge against Marine tanks.

To the west, thousands of Army vehicles were crossing the Euphrates and moving toward Baghdad after an unsuccessful attempt by Iraqi forces to defend a bridge at Musayyib. Scores of blown-up Iraqi vehicles and dozens of bodies lined the roads as the U.S. troops passed by.

U.S. defense officials said two Republican Guard divisions were badly weakened by the approaching Americans on Wednesday. U.S. forces incurred minimal losses in those battles, but the Iraqi



A convoy of 2nd MEF (Marine Expeditionary Force) crosses a bridge over the Euphrates river in the town of Nassariya in central Iraq April 3, 2003. U.S. troops pushed to within six miles of the southern edge of Baghdad on Thursday, and were preparing to fight for control of the city's airport, U.S. officials said. Reuters photo.

regime vowed that resistance would stiffen.

"Fight them with your hands, God will disgrace them," said a statement attributed to Saddam, and read by Information Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf on Iraqi satellite television.

"We're now trying to exhaust them," al-Sahhaf said of the invading forces, "making them more tired until our leadership decides the time and method to clean our territory of their desecration."

Two U.S. aircraft went down Wednesday near the city of Karla, 50 miles south of Baghdad - a Navy Hornet and an Army Black Hawk helicopter. U.S. officials said six soldiers aboard the Black Hawk were killed, while search and rescue operations were under way for the missing Navy pilot.

After initially reporting that both aircraft were downed by Iraqi fire, officials said Thursday the cause in each case was not yet determined.

Despite the successful push toward Baghdad, senior U.S. commanders sought to lower expectations of an imminent takeover of Saddam's capital.

The Americans may soon face a choice between continuing their advance into the city of 5 million, with the possibility of costly street fighting, or waiting for reinforcements while giving Iraqis a chance to challenge the regime themselves.

U.S. commanders would be pleased if their reception in Baghdad

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Highlighting the cruel nature of Iraqi regime

by Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 3, 2003 - Since the beginning of the war in Iraq, defense officials have pointed out the Iraqi regime's policy of consistently ignoring the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions.

From setting death squads on their own people to holing up in mosques and shrines, regime forces have flouted international conventions.

The most recent, and a most egregious, example is in the Ali Mosque in Najaf.

After Mecca and Medina, the Ali Mosque is the most sacred shrine for Shi'ia Islam. Shiite Islam originated as a political movement supporting Ali - the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam - as the rightful leader of the Islamic state. The majority of southern Iraqis are Shi'ia.

The mosque houses the tomb of Ali.

As coalition forces entered Najaf, Iraqi forces holed up in the mosque and began firing on members of the 101st Airborne Division. The American soldiers would not return fire, said Army Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks, deputy chief of operations for U.S. Central Command.

"The regime use of the Ali Mosque for military purposes to trigger a coalition response is just the latest detestable example of the regime's strategy of putting sacred sites in danger," he said.

Brooks stressed that under the laws of war American troops could

return fire. "We chose not to fire back," he said. "And that's a very important distinction. The regime is firing from within a mosque: Something that doesn't have military value, and that should be protected by them. It's being protected by us."

Brooks said this example showcases the U.S. approach to cultural and humanitarian areas. "While we do always have the choice of returning fire to respond to any threat that's posed on the battlefield, we approach all of our decisions on the battlefield - even at the lowest tactical level - ... with discrimination, with consideration to the outcome of that action," he said.

In village after village, coalition forces are seeing the same examples. "This is more than just the decision of a local commander. It's too widespread for that," said a defense official. Schools are armories for the Iraqi regimes. Hospitals are headquarters for death squad commanders.

Brooks said coalition forces are seeing a clear pattern of violations. In several towns, Iraqi paramilitary forces are storing their weapons and weapons caches inside schools - often with children still using the facility.

The hospital in Nasiriyah, where coalition special operations forces rescued Army Pfc. Jessica D. Lynch, forces also found ammunition, mortars and other equipment that pointed to its nature as a military headquarters.

At the first hospital coalition forces encountered outside Nasiriyah,

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CNN Report: Iraq torture chamber found

ABU AL KHASIB, Iraq (CNN) — A torture chamber equipped with hooks hanging from ceilings and an on-site electrocution room has been found in the basement of an Iraqi police station, an embedded reporter with the BBC reports.

The reporter said the British Royal Marines from Alpha Company 40 Commando entered the facility — home to Saddam Hussein's dreaded internal security police — looking for clues about local militia groups.

Weapons, maps and other documents were found in the raid in the town of Abu Al Khasib, the BBC reporter said Wednesday. But it was downstairs where they found the torture chamber.

One room was completely bare, except for two tires and an electric cable, the BBC reporter said.

He said he was told that an interrogator would use the tires to stand on, while water was poured into the room and the prisoner electrocuted.

Other rooms had hooks hanging from the ceiling, while another



The old tires protected the torturer while the victim stood on a wet floor and was electrocuted, a BBC reporter was told.

1.2 meter by 2.4 meter (4 foot by 8 foot) cell was equipped with just a pillow and mattress.

The reporter said he interviewed one man, who did not want to be identified, who said prisoners were blindfolded, tied up, hung on the hooks and then beaten.

The man also said a citizen who committed a crime could avoid being tortured by putting up cash — about \$1,600 for stealing, and almost twice that for murder, according to the BBC reporter.

U.S. troops push into Baghdad's outskirts continued

resembled the scene Wednesday in the southern city of Najaf, where American journalists reported that thousands of Iraqis poured into the streets to welcome a Humvee column carrying an American colonel and his troops.

The Los Angeles Times reported that the Americans had managed to secure Najaf's gold-domed Ali Mosque, one of the most sacred sites for Shiite Muslims, after three days of combat. The Americans said some of their troops had been fired on by Iraqi forces inside the mosque.

Jessica Lynch, the 19-year-old Army private freed from Iraqi captivity in a commando raid, was recuperating Thursday at a military hospital in Germany. She spoke by telephone for 15 minutes with her family in Palestine, W. Va.

Randy Coleman, a military spokesman in West Virginia, said Lynch had fractures in both legs, and her family said one arm was injured. U.S. officials in Kuwait said she also had at least one gunshot wound.

Lynch, rescued Tuesday from an Iraqi hospital, shot several enemy soldiers after Iraqi forces ambushed her maintenance company, firing until she ran out of ammunition, The Washington Post reported.

She watched several soldiers in her unit die and was stabbed when Iraqi forces closed in, The Post quoted U.S. officials as saying. Pentagon officials and family members declined comment on the report.

The commandos who freed Lynch also retrieved 11 bodies from the Iraqi hospital; U.S. officials said some were believed to be Americans.

Al-Sahhaf, the Iraqi information minister, told reporters Thursday that the bodies were indeed American soldiers, killed on the third and fourth day of the war.

"Their government is not giving the true number of their fallen," al-Sahhaf said. He also said more than 30 Iraqi civilians had been killed



A U.S. commander in the Gulf said on April 3, 2003 that U.S. special forces had raided Iraq's Tharthar Palace, about 56 miles from Baghdad, a residence of President Saddam Hussein. Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks said special forces were also "denying (Iraqi) regime movement" on the road north of Baghdad toward Saddam's hometown stronghold of Tikrit. The Tharthar palace is seen in this DigitalGlobe September, 2002 satellite image. Reuters photo.

and more than 200 injured in the past 24 hours in bombardments of Baghdad and other cities.

In southern Iraq, British forces made their deepest incursion yet into the city of Basra, fighting to within four miles of the city center and setting up a base at a technical college. So far, the British have steered away from an all-out assault, hoping civilians in the city of 1.3 million rise up against Iraqi defense forces.

Coalition forces move into Baghdad

U.S. officers: Baghdad airport attacked

by Chris Tomlinson

NEAR BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP) - U.S. forces launched an attack Thursday on Baghdad's international airport as American soldiers swept to the outskirts of the Iraqi capital, American officers said.

Artillery fire could be heard near Saddam International Airport on the southwestern edge of the capital. Tracer rounds raced through the blackened sky and artillery shells exploded in the air.

Officers of the 3rd Infantry Division told an Associated Press reporter assigned to the unit that the attack on the airport had begun.

Earlier Thursday, the 3rd Infantry Division swept north from the Euphrates River town of Musayyib and engaged Iraqi forces in running battles along the southern edge of Baghdad.

Power wiped out in Iraqi capital

by Hamza Hendawi

BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP) - The Iraqi capital plunged into darkness Thursday night as U.S.-led forces closed in on the city and loud explosions thundered through the outskirts.

The blasts persisted for nearly 15 minutes before the power went off in huge sections of Baghdad. It soon appeared that the entire city had lost electricity. It was the first widespread electrical failure in Baghdad since the U.S.-led bombardment began two weeks ago.

The reason for the loss of power was not immediately clear. However, U.S. troops from the 3rd Infantry Division were reported to be 15 miles south of the center of Baghdad.

Highlighting the cruel nature of Iraqi regime continued

there was a T-55 tank parked outside. Brooks conjectured the Iraqis placed the tank there in hopes that coalition forces would fire on it and the regime could make propaganda value out of the action.

Using these facilities for military purposes is clearly against the laws of armed conflict, Brooks said.

“The enemy poses as civilians to deceive coalition forces and ambush them,” said Pentagon spokeswoman Torie Clarke during a press conference March 29. “They fake surrenders to ambush them. They continue to place military assets in and around civilians. They use human shields, deliberately destroy or attempt to destroy the oil fields. And they use civilian vehicles, including ambulances, to transport their military.”

In addition to these clear violations, the Iraqi regime uses death squads to enforce its will on what’s left of its army and the Republican Guard.

These death squads report to the Hussein family directly, said Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld during a March 28 press conference. “Their ranks are populated with criminals released from Iraqi prisons,” he said. “They dress in civilian clothes and operate from private homes, confiscated from innocent people, and try to blend in with the civilian population.”

President Bush highlighted the cruelty of the Iraqi regime well before the war started. In his radio address March 15, Bush spoke of Saddam Hussein’s henchmen.

“We know from human rights groups that dissidents in Iraq are tortured, imprisoned and sometimes just disappear; their hands, feet and tongues are cut off; their eyes, gouged out; and female relatives are raped in their presence,” the president said.

Rumsfeld said that in another instance the Fedayeen Saddam beheaded people with swords. “They put on American and British uniforms to try to fool regular Iraqi soldiers into surrendering to them, and then execute them as an example for others who might contemplate defection or capitulation,” he said.

“Their name, Fedayeen Saddam, is a lie, because their purpose is certainly not to make martyrs of themselves, but to make martyrs of innocent Iraqis opposed to Saddam’s rule,” the secretary said March 28. “But we will take them at their word, and if their wish is to die for Saddam Hussein, they will be accommodated.”

The treatment of prisoners of war is another area where the Iraqi regime clearly is violating the Geneva Conventions. Coalition forces have more than 4,500 Iraqi prisoners of war. The International Red Cross has met with these prisoners and ascertained that they are being treated humanely.

The Iraqis hold at least seven Americans, with 15 more listed as missing in action. The Red Cross has not seen the American POWs. The families of those men and women have no idea if their loved ones are being treated well.

Iraqi television broadcast videos of captured U.S. service members and the dead bodies of others. The Geneva Conventions specifically forbid captors from broadcasting these images if they are made to humiliate the service members.

Even more disturbing than this are charges that Iraqi death squads executed coalition soldiers after they surrendered. Prime Minister Tony Blair charged the Iraqis with murdering two British soldiers. Again, the Iraqi broadcast pictures of their dead bodies.

According to U.S. officials, there are more reports:

- o The Iraqis executed 16 Kurds in the city of Kirkuk.
- o Iraqi death squads in Basra have fired mortars and machine guns at civilians trying to escape their grasp.
- o The death squads hanged a woman for waving to a coalition convoy.
- o Iraqi forces feigned surrender and killed a number of U.S. Marines who approached them to take them prisoner.
- o Iraqi armed forces have used women and children as human shields.

Even those who volunteered to be human shields for Saddam Hussein have learned how vicious this regime is. In the April 2 press briefing, spokeswoman Clarke quoted from a story about Daniel Pepper - who volunteered to serve as a human shield in Baghdad.

The story was in the London Sunday Telegraph newspaper on March 23. In it Pepper said, “I was shocked when I first met a pro-war Iraqi in Baghdad, a taxi driver taking me back to my hotel late at night. I

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U.S. Marines with India Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Regiment, attack An Numniyah. (Baltimore Sun photo by John Makely)

Wounded Marines recall harrowing Iraq combat experiences

by Gerry J. Gilmore, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 2, 2003 – One recalled experiencing a type of blindness caused by darkness and the “fog of war,” while the other noted it was hard to see the enemy because of deception.

These were the views of Marines 1st Lt. James Unwins and 1st Sgt. Bruce Cole, recently wounded in combat in Iraq. The two, now recovering at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Germany, told their stories to reporters today.

Unwins, 26, of South Pasadena, Calif., remembered a grueling 48 hours trucking supplies to fellow Marines striving to secure a bridge crossing across the Euphrates River near the town of Nasiriyah.

Near nightfall on March 26, Unwins and his group of drivers and mechanics from the 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, had established a temporary rest-and-refit stop at an abandoned Iraqi gas station. Marine bulldozers piling up berms or mounds of earth around the station improved security, he noted.

“It was looking like a pretty good place to spend a couple of days,” the lieutenant recalled. “We had Marines set up on the perimeter around this berm, so our security was in place.”

Darkness had fallen when Unwins “was pulling my sleeping bag out.” The lieutenant didn’t know it then, but all hell was about to break loose.

Suddenly, “we started having a kind of sporadic fire ... I saw the tracer rounds passing over the berm of the camp,” Unwins remarked. At first, he thought “it was just someone kind of sniping the camp.”

Then, “we really started to take heavy fire,” Unwins recalled, “and that’s when the small-arms fire escalated to rocket-propelled grenades and mortars.”

At that point an RPG round plowed into a nearby vehicle and shrapnel whickered toward the lieutenant.

Hot metal struck his lower right leg, then went “all the way up to the left leg,” Unwins pointed out. Then, another piece of metal sliced his left arm.

“The shrapnel in the leg kind of took me out of the fight,” Unwins said, noting that a corpsman quickly began treating him.

The night’s “darkness really created the ‘fog of war’” during the fight, the lieutenant emphasized. Consequently, there was “no clue,” he declared, as to the enemy’s position, other than the streaking tracer rounds “coming from all three sides of our perimeter.”

In contrast to Unwins’ nighttime combat experiences, 1st Sgt. Cole said he had fought the enemy during the full light of day.

However, Cole’s Iraqi foes didn’t enlist Mother Nature to cloak their attack, but instead resorted to dastardly deception that violates the rules of war under the Geneva Conventions.

On the morning of March 27, Cole said his battalion was headed north on Iraqi Highway 1 as the main attacking element.

“It was a bright morning,” the 39-year-old Beaumont, Texas, native recalled. Berms and ditches had been established along both sides of the highway, he noted, which seemed to both channel and restrict the several-hundred-vehicle strong convoy as it continued up the road.

Cole recalled the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle he was in was in the lead of a column of trucks just behind the heavy armor. The first sergeant pointed out that many Iraqi civilians were observing the convoy, seemed friendly and were waving to the Marines.

Shortly after this, he noted, the U.S. troops were under attack, first with firing heard at the column’s front where the tanks were. Then, more firing was evident, he added, emanating from the rear.

“There were engagements north of us; there were engagements south of us,” the first sergeant remarked. Some Iraqi civilians had moved toward the Marines, he said, “as close as maybe 50 meters off the road, standing on top of the berms.”

“It was difficult to determine where the firing was coming from,” Cole said, noting that bullets were ping-pong off the Marines’ vehicles and ricocheting off the stolid berms.

Not all of the civilian-garbed Iraqis were attacking the Marines, the first sergeant emphasized, noting some seemed as surprised and “just as afraid as anyone else from the look of fear on their faces.”

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Sgt. Robert Gardner (left) and Lance Cpl. Jeromy Pilon, both with the Marines’ India Company, ready an explosive that will be placed inside the captured Iraqi tank behind them. Marines also destroyed a new Mercedes truck containing high-tech communications gear, which they found parked under an overpass. (Sun photo by John Makely)

Pentagon spokeswoman: Coalition ‘feeding, helping Muslims’

by Kathleen T. Rhem, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 2, 2003 – Working from the notion that a picture is worth a thousand words, Pentagon officials this afternoon showed reporters and a live television audience around the world photographs of coalition forces providing food aid to Iraqi civilians.

“The coalition forces are the ones helping and feeding Muslims in Iraq,” Pentagon spokeswoman Torie Clarke said at a Pentagon briefing. Her comments came in response to calls the Iraqi government has made for Muslims to rise up against Americans.

She added that two American ships will deliver more than 50,000 tons of wheat – enough to feed 4 million to 5 million Iraqis for a month – “within just a few days.”

As Operation Iraqi Freedom is now in its 13th day, Army Maj. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, vice director of operations for the Joint Staff, announced coalition forces are within 30 miles of Baghdad.

Since the operation began, coalition forces have fired more than 700 cruise missiles and more than 10,000 precision-guided munitions, McChrystal said. He showed a gun-camera video clip from an Air Force F-117 stealth fighter that dropped a precision-guided weapon on an Iraqi surface-to-air missile facility on Baghdad’s southwestern outskirts.

Coalition forces today are engaging Iraqi Republican Guard divisions protecting the capital. Some of these units have been damaged to the extent that they “can no longer act as a coherent element on the battlefield,” McChrystal said.

He described enemy contact today as “sporadic, but not able to stop coalition maneuver.”

This doesn’t mean they no longer pose a threat to coalition forces. McChrystal explained there are still “pockets of resistance” within these units. “There remains tough fighting ahead,” the general warned.

American and other coalition forces are preparing for a tough fight and stiff resistance in and around Baghdad in coming days. “We are not expecting to drive into Baghdad suddenly and seize it in a ‘coup de main’ or anything like that,” McChrystal said. (A coup de main is an offensive operation based on surprise and simultaneous execution of supporting operations to achieve success in one swift stroke.)

Iraqi chemical and biological capabilities are a specific concern to coalition commanders as friendly forces tighten the noose around Baghdad. McChrystal noted the Iraqi regime has proven its propensity to use such weapons.

“Clearly, as we threaten the core of the regime, which Baghdad and Tikrit represent, we believe that the likelihood of them using those weapons goes up,” he said. He added that such an action would be a war crime and a “grave mistake” but still would not stop the coalition advance.



U.S. Marines treat a man in a makeshift medical clinic during a humanitarian mission in Shu mulli, Iraq. (Sun photo by John Makely)

Clarke also highlighted a bit of good news that has been overshadowed by the excitement surrounding the rescue of Army Pfc. Jessica Lynch, the West Virginian held captive by Iraqi forces. With little fanfare, coalition forces have managed to secure the Hadithah Dam, which is on the Euphrates River in northern Iraq.

Before the war began, defense officials had expressed concern that Saddam Hussein might destroy the dam and cause widespread flooding as part of a “scorched earth” policy.

“(With) the kinds of economic and environmental damage they’ve wreaked on the country before, the possibility of them doing it again was pretty high,” Clarke said. “So (securing this dam is) a very good sign of the progress we’re making.”



Marine Chris Britt gets to know Iraqi youths in Shumulli, a common scene yesterday as U.S. forces delivered aid in an effort to dispel government propaganda and win civilians’ support. (Sun photo by John Makely)

by Juliana Gittler, Stars and Stripes

It's almost like being there without getting dirty.

Thick gray-yellow dust obscures the images of troops as they sleep, eat or cradle their weapons against the omnipresent sand. It's desert war, harsh and unforgiving.

And now, it's daily fare on your television.

Servicemembers live it, and their friends, families and fellow troops see it — the dirt, the grime and the pain. That's because the Department of Defense's journalism embed program has 500 reporters and associates traveling and living with troops around the Persian Gulf.

"It's very important the American public sees the realities of what their sons and daughters risk on the ground out there," said Army Maj. Brian Maka.

"It's like 'The Osbournes' with guns," David Hunt, a retired Army colonel and a military commentator for Fox News, told Stars and Stripes.

Advocates say the program helps troops feel appreciated and gives viewers and readers unparalleled and constant access to war's reality. Except when security might be threatened, it's no-holds-barred coverage.

Military leaders and many journalists have lauded the system for giving battle a real and human face.

For instance, Maka — now a public affairs officer for the Army's 2nd Infantry Division in South Korea — was an infantry officer in the first Gulf War. He returned to an American public that thought blood barely had been shed because they didn't see a ground war on CNN.

Journalists, too, find a formerly antagonistic relationship with the military has warmed into cooperation. Jason Bellini, a CNN correspondent embedded with the Marines' 15th artillery unit, told The Associated Press he's found the troops and their leaders to be obliging.

"So far, the embedding seems to have gone very well," Victoria Clarke, assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, told the American Forces Press Service.

But between praise and approval for the new media-military cooperation are voices of concern about accuracy, scope and analysis.

Embedded journalists see a microscopic view of the war, they say — a detailed look at only one unit among many. "We're not getting enough of a general feel of the war on a whole," said retired Army Brig. Gen. David Grange, a military analysts for CNN.

For better or worse, embedded journalists are bringing the war home

"You're just seeing slices."

The Pentagon should provide more information from headquarters, he said, so one setback doesn't cast a pallor over public sentiment — or one success create unwarranted optimism.

Critics also fear some journalists go too far with their personal take on events they see. "They can screw it up trying to assess," Grange said.

Maka agrees that war experience doesn't prepare a journalist to provide analysis. "It does not make him set up to be the expert," he said. Close coverage works only "as long as he's not editorializing."

That job falls on military analysts — like Hunt and Grange — hired by networks to put the war in context.

"I'm always on eggshells because I'm concerned about getting someone killed," Grange said, adding that avoiding such a tragedy "is my responsibility as an analyst." He said he believes some military experts get carried away on air. "You can't let it go to your head."

Embedding has raised concerns that the drama of televised warfare is getting in the way of actual warfare. "We've got pilots getting back and giving interviews before they do a debriefing," Hunt said.

Still, Hunt said, despite a few criticisms of embedding, "I think it's working. But you've got to be careful, very careful. We have really to think this thing through. Right now we're just in awe of this."

"It's going to change the nature of warfare, not just reporting," he said.

Highlighting the cruel nature of Iraqi regime continued

explained that I was an American and said, as we shields always did, 'Bush bad, war bad, Iraq good.'

"He looked at me with an expression of incredulity. As he realized I was serious, he slowed down and started to speak in broken English about the evils of Saddam's regime," Clarke quoted Pepper as saying. "Until then, I had only heard the president, Saddam, spoken of with respect, but now this guy was telling me how all of Iraq's oil money went into Saddam's pocket, and that if you opposed him politically, he would kill your whole family."

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President discusses Operation Iraqi Freedom at Camp Lejeune

Remarks by the President to the Military Personnel and Their Families Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune Camp Lejeune, North Carolina

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much. Thank you all so very much for that warm welcome. It's such an honor to be here. Especially pleased to be traveling today with a great First Lady, Laura Bush. (Applause.) We really appreciate your welcome and we're proud to be with the Marines and sailors and families of Camp Lejeune. There's no finer sight, no finer sight, than to see 12,000 United States Marines and Corpsmen — (applause) — unless you happen to be a member of the Iraqi Republican Guard. (Applause.)

For more than 60 years, Marines have gone forth from Camp Lejeune to fight our country's battles. Now America has entered a fierce struggle to protect the world from a grave danger and to bring freedom to an oppressed people. As the forces of our coalition advance, we learn more about the atrocities of the Iraqi regime and the deep fear that Saddam Hussein has instilled in the Iraqi people. Yet, no scheme of this enemy, no crime of a dying regime will divert us from our mission. We will not stop until Iraq is free. (Applause.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We love you, President Bush!. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: When freedom needs defending, America turns to our military. And as they do their job, our men and women in uniform count on their families — like you all here today. This is a time of hardship for many military families. Some of you have been separated from your loved ones for quite a while because of long deployments. All of America is grateful for your sacrifice. And Laura and I are here to thank each one of you. (Applause.)

We're here to thank the Marines. (Applause.) I also want to thank the men and women of the Marine Forces Reserve who are serving here and abroad. (Applause.) Hundreds of reserve units across America have been activated in this time of war, and our country

Wounded Marines recall harrowing Iraq combat experiences continued

In the middle of all this bedlam "the difficult part was trying to return fire and figure out who to shoot at," Cole asserted. He said the bright sky juxtaposed against the berms helped to mask the enemy's positions.

He turned in his seat and began to return fire out the vehicle's window. Then the "Top Kick" was hit in the arm.

"A bullet entered my forearm and exited through the back of my triceps, (which) knocked the rifle out of my hand," Cole recalled.

The attack ended. Cole attributed his and the convoy's survival of the ambush "to everybody's clear head and good thinking and the training that we had been through."



President Bush gives a thumbs up as he is introduced before speaking to a crowd of Marines and their families at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. (AP photo)

thanks these fine citizens and their employers for putting duty first.

I want to thank Major General David Mize for his hospitality and his leadership. I want to thank Major General John Castelow, Commanding General of the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force, for his leadership and strength. (Applause.) I appreciate so very much members of the North Carolina congressional delegation who traveled with Laura and me today — Senators Edwards and Dole,

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PFC David Welle of Murphysboro, Ill. with India Co., 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division, uses a radio as he stands in front of a mural of Saddam Hussein, while on patrol in Numaniyah, southeast of Baghdad, Iraq, Thursday, April 3, 2003. Officers of the 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines are to meet on Thursday with local leaders in Numaniyah, worrying that destruction and confiscation of weapons will leave them unable to maintain security in the town. (AP Photo/Laura Rauch)

Soldiers in Koreas' DMZ use intimidation

by Daniel Cooney

PANMUNJOM, Korea (AP) - A North Korean soldier reaches for his sidearm as if to pull it from its holster, but doesn't. He then flicks a finger across his neck in a throat-slashing gesture at South Korean soldiers.

Such attempts to intimidate are regular these days for communist troops who face off against South Korean and a small number of U.S. soldiers in the demilitarized zone that divides the Korean Peninsula, according to U.S. Army Lt. Col. Matthew Margotta.

South Korean troops also posture. Just feet from the North's soldiers in Panmunjom, a military village that straddles the border, the South's soldiers stand in taekwondo poses, ready to fight - legs apart, arms bent and fists clenched.

They wear aviator sunglasses with reflective lenses to "try to intimidate the North Koreans," said U.S. Specialist Jonathan Butts.

Though such antagonistic behavior has not been uncommon as relations have ebbed and spiked on the Korean Peninsula ever since the 1950-53 Korean War, it is indicative of current tension.

Washington has accused the North of having a secret nuclear weapons program, in violation of a 1994 pact. Pyongyang says its nuclear development is for peaceful purposes and has said it fears Washington will invade the communist state once its done fighting in Iraq.

President Bush has said he wants to resolve the crisis peacefully, but has not ruled out a military solution.

Earlier this week, the United States said it was keeping stealth fighter jets in South Korea that arrived last month for a training exercise. The radar-evading F-117s are capable of taking out the North's Yongbyon nuclear plant - an attack North Korea has accused Washington of plotting.

The Korean border is the world's most heavily fortified, with almost 2 million troops deployed on the peninsula, including 37,000 American troops stationed in South Korea.

Last week, North Korea suspended the sole regular contact with the U.S.-led United Nations Command that monitors the Korean War armistice. Those weekly meetings in Panmunjom, though usually quick and business like, were an important diplomatic portal used to keep the peace between the two sides which technically are still at war.

In better days - such as in 2000 when the leaders of North and South Korea held a summit in Pyongyang - senior military officials from both sides sometimes relaxed with alcoholic drinks after ending a formal meeting, said Steve Oertwig, a U.S. military spokesman.

"Every now and then, they may have an alcoholic beverage. It's not a big party," Oertwig said. "It's a chance to encourage trust and build a relationship with them. It's part of being a sociable host.

Both sides would toast each other for peace and cooperation on the Korean Peninsula."

A U.S. soldier in the demilitarized zone told The Associated Press that "one North Korean had a liking for Bombay gin."

During a visit to Panmunjom this week, the border village was quiet. North Korean soldiers stood well back from a small concrete seam in the earth that marks the frontier. There was no sign of the threatening gestures mentioned by Margotta, head of the local U.N. Command unit.

Instead, the North's soldiers used binoculars and cameras to watch the South and grimaced at some visiting journalists.

A group of South Korean school children looked into one of three blue huts used for the talks as part of a visit to the demilitarized zone.

In the small building, a boardroom table that is half in North Korea and half in the South, was bare, except for a small U.N. flag. Dozens of chairs were empty. Two South Korean soldiers stood guard, impassive to the visitors.

It's not clear when the meeting hut will again be used - or if there will be talks at a higher level to try to defuse tension over the North's alleged nuclear program.

North Korea has repeatedly refused to hold multilateral talks on the issue. It insists on direct meetings with the United States to negotiate a nonaggression treaty - something Washington has so far refused to do. The U.N. Security Council plans to discuss the North Korean nuclear issue next week.



U.S. Army Bradley fighting vehicles from A Company 3rd Battalion 7th Regiment continue on their way after destroying an Iraqi military vehicle on the outskirts of Baghdad Thursday, March 3, 2003. The American forces crossed the Euphrates Thursday and engaged Iraqi forces near the Iraqi capital. (AP Photo/John Moore)

U.S. aircraft pound Taliban holdouts

by Kathy Gannon

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (AP) - Heavy pounding by U.S. fighter aircraft drove Taliban holdouts from their mountain hideout, where cleanup crews Thursday found a transit camp and a staging ground for hit and run assaults by the religious militia and their allies.

"We discovered a base with tents, food, weapons. It was here that Taliban coming from Pakistan would stay before moving out to other parts of the country," Fazluddin Agha, district police chief of Spinboldak, told The Associated Press.

U.S. air support launched from Bagram Air Base pounded the Tor Ghar mountain range, where about 60 Taliban fighters were dug in after fleeing a border village during fighting a day earlier.

Army spokesman Col. Roger King said Thursday that more than 35,000 pounds of ordnance was dropped or fired from five types of aircraft - Harrier jets, B-1 bombers, A-10 Thunderbolts and helicopter gunships - on the rebel positions over a 14-hour span.

"It's a pretty good use of close air support," King told reporters at Bagram Air Base, headquarters for the international coalition in Afghanistan. "This action has probably integrated the most different types of assets of any operation we have had in the last six months or so."

He said the operation was continuing Thursday.

About 45 special forces soldiers and 250 Afghan soldiers drove the Taliban into the mountains from the village of Sikai Lashki, 25 miles north of Spinboldak, the gateway to southeastern Afghanistan.

In the first assault, two A-10 fighter jets fired seven white phosphorous rockets and 520 30 mm rounds, the military said. Two Apache helicopters followed, firing 130 30 mm rounds and 67 2.75 mm rockets, it said.

Several Afghan fighters were injured, as were their Taliban enemies, according to Agha. He said the Taliban were being led by local commander Hafiz Abdul Rahman.

"We have found two bodies of Taliban fighters and are looking for Rahman," Agha said, adding that authorities suspect some of the Taliban were trying to flee into Pakistan.

U.S. or coalition forces haven't found such a large group of suspected Taliban in several months, King said.

"We haven't seen more than 20 at a time in a long time," he said.

There were no reports of U.S. casualties, but an Afghan militia soldier



Afghan soldiers drill at a mosque in Kabul, Afghanistan, Wednesday, April 2, 2003. Hundreds of U.S. forces and Afghan soldiers start embedded operation to attack Taliban remnants in southern Afghanistan after the Taliban's leader Mullah Mohammed Omar issued a call for a jihad against US and Afghanistan government this week. (AP Photo/ Xinhua, Wang Lei)

was evacuated to Kandahar airfield after being shot in the abdomen, King said. The soldier underwent an operation and his condition was stable. It was not clear how many rebel fighters had been injured.

With help from the air support, the U.S. and Afghan forces "felt that they had the enemy force pretty much pushed up into one section of high ground. They tried to keep pressure on them through the night and now they're going to go in and see what they can find today," King said.

Evidence is mounting in the southern regions of Afghanistan that the Taliban is reorganizing and has found an ally in rebel commander Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, labeled a terrorist and hunted by U.S. troops.

"Six months ago their attacks were sporadic. But today there is a new organization to the Taliban," Kandahar's 2nd Corps commander, Khan Mohammed, said at the sprawling compound where Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammed Omar once lived.

In the last two weeks in southern Afghanistan, a Red Cross worker was waylaid and murdered, and two U.S. servicemen were killed in an ambush on their convoy. Three explosions, apparently caused by rockets, were heard Wednesday evening at a U.S. base near Khost.

Khalid Pashtoon, a spokesman for the Kandahar governor, told The Associated Press that the Red Cross worker, Ricardo Munguia of El Salvador, was shot 20 times and the vehicles in his convoy were

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from the great state of North Carolina, thank you for coming. (Applause.)

I appreciate members of the United States House of Representatives — Congressmen Balance, Jones and McIntyre — for traveling with



us. These five are five members of the Congress are s t r o n g supporters of the Marines and the United States military. (Applause.)

I met the Mayor and I want to

thank Madam Mayor and members of the County Commission for being so supportive of the families and the personnel here at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. I want to thank very much those veterans who are here, and retired military members. (Applause.) I want to thank Lone Star. (Applause.) We kind of like that name. (Laughter.)

U.S. aircraft pound Taliban holdouts continued

torched. The International Committee of the Red Cross ordered its workers not to travel until further notice.

“This is their aim, to frighten international aid workers away from southern Afghanistan so that the reconstruction cannot go ahead and the government is destabilized,” said Mohammed, the 2nd Corps commander.

He accused Pakistan of aiding the Taliban’s reorganization and of harboring its key leaders. He was not alone.

In Spinboldak, Khalid Khan, the town’s director of foreign affairs, said Taliban leaders have found safe havens “in hundreds of homes in Quetta,” the capital of Pakistan’s southwestern Baluchistan province.

Khan said the support for fleeing Taliban is coming from Pakistan’s militant Muslim groups. But Mohammed said it also is coming from the Pakistan government - a key ally of the U.S.-led coalition’s war on terror in Afghanistan.

“Without state support these groups couldn’t operate,” Mohammed said.

Pakistan denies helping militant groups, yet leaders have been freed from house arrest and are urging the faithful in Pakistan mosques to wage jihad against the United States.

The latest battle in the Tor Ghar Mountains is not far from Pakistan’s semiautonomous tribal belt. U.S. and European intelligence sources say Taliban fleeing the U.S. coalition in Afghanistan have found refuge in that region.

I very much want to say a little something about a person that Laura and I met at Marine One when it landed, Laura Kay Brett.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah!

THE PRESIDENT: You may know Laura — somebody knows Laura Kay out there. (Laughter.) But you need to know her story. You see, Laura Kay is Director of Volunteer Services at the YMCA Camp Lejeune. She represents hundreds, thousands of people who volunteer to make somebody’s life better. She runs a Mom-to-Mom program to help people who may need help. Laura Kay represents the best of America, somebody who is willing to love a neighbor just like she’d like to be loved herself.

I want to thank Laura Kay. I want to thank the thousands of you who are here who understand we can save somebody’s life by showing them love. We can help somebody who hurts by hugging a neighbor in need. (Applause.)

All around Camp Lejeune are monuments to the heroic achievements of the United States Marines. In the 14 days since the major ground war began, the Marine Corps has added new achievements to its great story. (Applause.)

On the first day of the campaign, Marine units were ordered to secure 600 Iraqi oil wells and prevent environmental disaster. And that mission was accomplished. (Applause.) U.S. Marines and our Royal Marine allies were sent in to take the Al Faw Peninsula and clear a path for humanitarian aid, and that job was done. (Applause.)

In the tough fighting at Al Nasiriyah, Marines continue to push back the enemy, and are showing the unrelenting courage worthy of the name Task Force Tarawa. (Applause.) Two nights ago, Marines and Special Operations forces set out on a daring rescue mission — and thanks to their skill and courage, a brave young soldier is now free. (Applause.)

These missions are difficult and they are dangerous, but no one becomes a Marine because it’s easy. (Applause.) Now our coalition moves forward. Marines are in the thick of the battle. And what we have begun, we will finish. (Applause.)

The United States and our allies pledged to act if the dictator did not disarm. The regime in Iraq is now learning that we keep our word. (Applause.) By our actions, we serve a great and just cause: We will remove weapons of mass destruction from the hands of mass murderers. Free nations will not sit and wait, leaving enemies free to plot another September the 11th, this time, perhaps with chemical or biological or nuclear terror. And by defending our own security, we are freeing the people of Iraq from one of the cruelest regimes on Earth. (Applause.)

At this hour, coalition forces are clearing southern cities and towns of the dictator’s death squads and enforcers. Our Special Forces and Army paratroopers, working with Kurdish militia, have opened

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a northern front against the enemy. Army and Marine divisions are engaging the enemy and advancing to the outskirts of Baghdad. (Applause.)

From the skies above, coalition aircraft and Cruise missiles are removing hundreds of military targets from Iraq. A vice is closing, and the days of a brutal regime are coming to an end. (Applause.)



Some servants of the regime have chosen to fill their final days with acts of cowardice and murder. In c o m b a t , Saddam's thugs s h i e l d themselves with women and children. They

have killed Iraqi citizens who welcome coalition troops. They force other Iraqis into battle, by threatening to torture or kill their families. They've executed prisoners of war. They've waged attacks under the white flag of truce. They concealed combat forces in civilian neighborhoods and schools and hospitals and mosques.

In this war, the Iraqi regime is doing — is terrorizing its own citizens, doing everything possible to maximize Iraqi civilian casualties, and then to exploit the deaths they've caused for propaganda. These are war criminals and they will be treated like war criminals. (Applause.)

In stark contrast, the citizens of Iraq are coming to know what kind of people we have sent to liberate them. American forces and our allies are treating innocent civilians with kindness, and showing proper respect to soldiers who surrender. Many Americans have seen the picture of Marine Lance Corporal Marcco Ware carrying a wounded Iraqi soldier on his shoulders to safety, for medical treatment. That's the picture of the strength and goodness of the U.S. Marines. (Applause.) That is a picture of America. (Applause.) People in the United States are proud of the honorable conduct of our military, and I'm proud to lead such brave and decent Americans. (Applause.)

I'm also proud that coalition victories are bringing food and water and medicine to the Iraqi people. Our coalition partners have constructed a pipeline to bring clean water to Umm Qasr. We're delivering emergency rations to the hungry. Right now, ships carrying enough American grain to feed millions are bound for Iraq. We're bringing aid, and we're bringing something more — we're bringing hope. (Applause.)

A man in one Iraqi village said this to one of our soldiers: "I want my freedom. I don't want food or water. I just want my freedom." America hears that man. We hear all Iraqis who yearn for liberty. And the people of Iraq have my pledge: Our fighting forces will press on

until your entire country is free. (Applause.)

The Iraqi people deserve to live in peace under leaders they have chosen. They deserve a government that respects the rights of every citizen and ethnic group. They deserve a country that is united, that's independent, and that is released from years of sanctions and sorrow. Our coalition has one goal for the future of Iraq — to return that great country to its own people. (Applause.)

Building a free and prosperous Iraq after the regime is gone will require — will be the work of the Iraqi people for years to come. And they will have our help. Today the goal is to remove the Iraqi regime and to rid Iraq of weapons of mass destruction. And that is the task of the United States military and our coalition.

All who serve in this mission can know this: Your fellow citizens are behind you and our government will give you every tool you need for victory. (Applause.)

People of this country take pride in your victories, and we share in your losses. Camp Lejeune has lost some good Marines. Every person who dies in the line of duty leaves a family that lives in grief. Every Marine who dies in the line of duty leaves comrades who mourn their loss.

There is a tradition in the Corps that no one who falls will be left behind on the battlefield. (Applause.) Our country has a tradition, as well. No one who falls will be forgotten by this grateful nation. We honor their service to America and we pray their families will receive God's comfort and God's grace. (Applause.)

These are sacrifices in a high calling — the defense of our nation and the peace of the world. Overcoming evil is the noblest cause and the hardest work. And the liberation of millions is the fulfillment of America's founding promise. The objectives we've set in this war are worthy of America, worthy of all the acts of heroism and generosity that have come before.

Once again, we are applying the power of our country to ensure our security and to serve the cause of justice. And we will prevail. (Applause.)

Our Armed Services have performed brilliantly in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Moving a massive force over 200 miles of enemy territory in a matter of days is a superb achievement. Yet there is work ahead for our coalition, for the American Armed Forces, and for the United States Marines. Having traveled hundreds of miles, we will now go the last 200 yards. (Applause.) The course is set. We're on the advance. Our destination is Baghdad, and we will accept nothing less than complete and final victory. (Applause.)

May God bless our country and all who defend her. Semper fi. (Applause.)

ESPN launches 'Jocks-to-GIs Direct' pen pal program

by Rudi Williams, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 2, 2003 – April 1 marked the start of an e-mail pen pal program between some service members overseas and some of the nation's top pro sports figures.

Household names like Tiger Woods, Roger Clemens, Shaquille O'Neal and Ricky Rudd stand out.

Under ESPN's "Jocks-to-GIs Direct" program, selected service members get the chance to be e-mail pen pals with some of America's greatest pro athletes. Some of their correspondence will also end up on ESPN.com and in ESPN The Magazine.

But for the pen pal program, there's a big catch: The chosen service members must guard the athlete's address like a military secret.

"We're setting up a special mailbox for each of the athletes," said John Papanek, editor in chief and senior vice president of ESPN The Magazine and one of the driving forces behind creating the program.

He noted that the mailboxes could be accessed easily from anybody's e-mail account. "Once we've selected the GI pen pal, we'll give that pen pal the athlete's address," Papanek said. "But we're asking that GI to please keep it to him or herself. We don't want the athletes to be bombarded with e-mail. It's kind of like a secret address, just for the pen pal."

Service members who don't have access to the Internet should ask their buddies to print out e-mails from athletes. Or public affairs offices could print pages and post them in high traffic areas.

However, Ashley Swadel, ESPN communications officer, said, "We'd like to ensure privacy of the corresponding e-mail addresses, so we simply ask that the pen pals are cautious to which computers they use, so as not to accidentally release the addresses or make them accessible to others."

Papanek said the idea of connecting major American pro athletes with GIs engaged in the Operation Iraqi Freedom and other overseas contingencies evolved from an idea proposed after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Logistical problems prevented ESPN from getting the program up and running when Enduring Freedom started.

"But as we got very close to Iraqi Freedom's beginning, we reinvigorated the program," he said, noting Pentagon officials were "wholeheartedly supportive of the idea."

Papanek said he and other ESPN officials and editors realized the close relationship between service members defending the country and freedom and the athletes performing on the fields and in arenas throughout the nation.

"They're the same age and they have so much in common with one another," he pointed out. "So we decided that it would be a great idea to put them in touch with one another."

So far, ESPN has firm commitments from 17 people. Besides the



ESPN The Magazine editor in chief John Papanek, left, was a driving force behind creating the pen pal program to give service members overseas a chance to correspond with their favorite pro athlete. Photo by Sean Hintz, ESPN

NBA's O'Neal, golfer Woods, baseball's Clemens and NASCAR's Rudd, others include Michael Strahan and Tiki Barber, New York Giants; Chamique Holdsclaw, WNBA Washington Mystics; Curt Schilling, Arizona Diamondbacks; Barry Zito, Oakland Athletics; Anson Carter, New York Rangers; and NASCAR driver Jeff Burton. Also taking part are NFL head coaches Jim Fassel of the Giants and Jon Gruden of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

"Many, many more are standing by who want to get involved," Papanek noted. "It's going to be a question of how many we can manage without getting the whole program flying out of control."

A March test to iron out any wrinkles in the program yielded about 500 replies from an invitation for pen pals during an 11-hour period.

"We can't set up a pen pal for every single GI," Papanek noted. "We made it clear that we're going to be selecting GIs from the many that applied to be pen pals with the athletes."

A group of ESPN.com editors have read all the service members' applications, which now number in the thousands.

"We've read them all and have made selections based on the quality of the correspondence," Papanek said. "We're trying to pick out a good mix of interesting people with stories to tell. We also consider GIs who have mentioned interest in a particular athlete."

He pointed out that some of the pen pals already have relationships

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A British tank crosses the street on the outskirts of Basra as Iraqis in cars leave this southern city in Iraq, Wednesday, April 3, 2003. British forces launched earlier an attack on Iraqi forces around the city and moved closer towards the center. (AP Photo/Anja Niedringhaus)

www.goarmy.com

ESPN launches 'Jocks-to-GIs Direct' pen pal program continued

with some of the athletes. "Some of them went to school with some of the athletes; some have met before; some have played in minor leagues together," Papanek noted. "We're using all those characteristics to pick the pen pal."

Papanek said that a series of 'chats' with athletes will be available on the ESPN Web site for service members not selected as pen pals. And there's another feature called "buzz chats," he noted. "We'll invite all members of the military stationed overseas to talk about topics in sports news, like the opening of baseball season, (the NCAA basketball) Final Four or (upcoming) NBA and NHL playoffs."

Service members can apply to become an athlete's pen pal at <http://sports.espn.go.com/chat/sportsnation/story?page=JTGD-030322>. Pen pal correspondence is at <http://sports.espn.go.com/chat/sportsnation/jockstogis/index>.

Applicants are asked to write, in 100 words or less, why they want to be a pen pal. "They submit that, and that's what we use to determine whether or not we can hook them up," Papanek explained.

He said ESPN The Magazine is printing some e-mails from the GIs in the issue that hit the newsstands April 2.

"We're excited about this and we think there are going to be some great stories that are told between these pairs of athletes and GIs," Papanek said.

Bill seeks tuition refunds for Reserves, Guard

Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — Rep. Martin Frost, D-Texas, introduced a bill that would give refunds to activated reservists and guardsmen enrolled in colleges and universities, but unable attend because they were called into service.

The bill, H.R. 1323, titled "Reservists and National Guard Opportunities and Protection of Education Act," calls for institutions of higher education to refund tuitions and fees to students called up for active duty; grant students a military leave of absence, and restore students' academic statuses with regard to credits earned, scholarships or grants when they return to their schooling.

"The brave men and women in our Reserves and National Guard shouldn't be penalized for answering the call to serve our country," Frost said in a statement. "It's only fair to refund reservists the tuition paid for classes they can't attend. And guaranteeing their educational status upon return from service will help them obtain college degrees."

According to the Defense Department, as of Saturday, the total number of Reserve personnel on active-duty is 216,811. The breakdown is 150,071 in the Army National Guard and Army Reserve; 9,494 in the Naval Reserve; 33,365 in the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve; 20,089 in the Marine Corps Reserve; and 3,792 in the Coast Guard Reserve.

Roughly 30 percent of all Reserves and guardsmen are enrolled in colleges, universities or other institutions of higher learning.

The bill will be referred to the House Education and Work Force Committee. No hearing or decision date has been set for Congress to work on the bill.



Members of India Company of the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines watch from a distance as U.S. artillery rounds are fired at Iraqi bunkers. Marines captured the city of Numaniyah with little resistance. (Baltimore Sun photo by John Makely)



Marines prepare to destroy a recoil-less rocket launcher that had been found among the stockpiles of material abandoned by Iraqi soldiers at Numaniyah. (Baltimore Sun photo by John Makely)



Spc. Mitchell Roe, 20, of Canton, Mich., with the 3rd Battalion, 69th Regiment Armor Task Force, watches the horizon as Iraqi artillery positions burn Wednesday in Iraq. Photo by JackGruber, USA Today.



A soldier serving with Number 1 Company 1st Battalion of the Irish Guards covers Royal Engineers trying to extinguish an oil well fire on the outskirts of Basra Thursday, April 3, 2003. (AP Photo/Giles Penfound, Pool)



Spc. Brent Hutchins, of the Scout Platoon, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, works on his weapon. Gas masks were ordered on for a short period of time when U.S. engineers destroyed a pair of enemy fuel tankers that contained suspicious substances. Photo by Joseph Giordono, Stars and Stripes.